

## **Micro finance and Women- A case study of villages around Alibaug, District-Raigad, Maharashtra, India.**

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**Abstract:** Raigad district facing the Arabian Sea has historical importance since ages. Clean, safe and virgin beaches, amazing nature and easy access are some of the peculiarities of villages in this district. It is gaining popularity as a tourist spot for city dwellers as it is commutable from Mumbai and Pune. The women in Raigad recognized this as an enterprising opportunity and are all set to welcome the tourists. These women have generated low cost, homely, delicious food for these picnickers. The typical homemaking gender in Raigad district went one step further and offered other local farm and kitchen products for sale. Papads, pickles, spices, fresh vegetables, coconut products, fish and fish products etc. are being sold to the tourists. Women entrepreneurs in this area are making every possible attempt to popularise typical products of Konkan region among visitors. Display of the material, pricing, proper packing, etc. is tempting the picnickers to buy them. This gesture is not only attracting tourists but is also creating a good source of income for these women and outcome of these efforts is upgradation of financial status of their families.

**Keywords:** Raigad district, Women entrepreneur, tourist, financial status.

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### **I. Introduction:**

Microfinance is known to be a very lucrative method of development for various poor and low income strata in the society. In this there is possibility of appropriate range of financé available to consumers and self employed personnel for households and other purposes.

Women entrepreneurs from villages near Alibaug, Raigad district can be a classic example of progress through microfinance. There are many self help groups also to arrange for minor financing for these cottage level enterprising women. There was dearth of employment and people had to look for suitable sources of earning, preferably self employment.

There are many villages around Alibaug, Raigad district facing the Arabian Sea. They have historical importance since ages. Other peculiarities of these villages are clean, safe (shallow) and virgin beaches, fascinating nature and easy approach. The beaches are becoming popular tourist spot for urban population as it is commutable from Mumbai and Pune. The women in Raigad have recognized this as an enterprising opportunity and have set themselves to welcome the tourists. These women started providing low cost, homely, delicious food for the picnickers. The typical homemaking gender in Raigad district went one step further and offered other local farm and kitchen products for sale. Papads, pickles, spices, fresh vegetables, coconut products, fish and fish products etc. are being sold to the tourists. Women entrepreneurs in this area are making every possible attempt to popularize typical products of Konkan region among visitors. Display of the material, pricing, proper packing, etc. is tempting the picnickers to buy them. This gesture is not only attracting tourists but is also creating a good source of income for these women and outcome of these efforts is upgradation of financial status of their families.

Raigad district is already popular for forts, clean beaches, lot of greenery, fresh fish and rich farmland. Further, RCF project brought a wave of modernisation to Alibaug Taluka. The scenario changed drastically and development was seen on industrial, social, economical levels, which affected almost all aspects of human life. Yet, this transformation hardly reached the small villages near Alibaug. Most of them were dominated by fishermen and small farmers. Their financial status was poor or lower middle class. They had very small pieces of land. Women here, in general were not empowered. They just had the role of completing domestic chores.

Objective of this paper is to envisage the change that occurred due to benefits of microfinance to the women in these villages.

Alibaug taluka is located adjacent to Arabian Sea and also has creeks joining to it. It is about 100km from Metrocity Mumbai and 200km from Pune. Work pressure and the stress through it made recreation a necessity for employees in both the cities. They found Alibaug as the nearest tourist spot as the best respite from the exhaustive schedule.

Kolaba fort at Alibaug is located on a rocky island near sea-shore and walking down into the fort during low tide is a thrilling experience. Of course one has to be careful to return before the high tide as the approach road is flooded during high tide. In tourists' impression Alibaug is like mini Goa. Clean sandy beaches, soothing greenery of coconut and beetle-nut trees are some of the attractions. Facilities of water sports and other recreational activities identical to Goa are being introduced for the picnickers at various beaches.

Village Korlai, few kms away from Alibaug is known for the remains of Portuguese fort, beautiful beach on one side and mountains on the other. Some ancient cannons are still there for visitors to get an idea of the weapons used then. Currently, there is light house in Korlai to guide the ships in Arabian Sea. It is accessible for the tourists. In fact, a guide explains signalling protocol of the light at light house. This increases tourists' interest in the place.

Revdanda is another such place where remains of ancient fort are there. Hence, this village attracts visitors due to thick greenery, antique fort and a huge strip of sandy beach.

The way to Murud is yet another fascinating drive with Arabian Sea on one side of the road and mountains on the other. Siddi Johar's palace is located few kms before Murud, though, entry is prohibited it is attractive from outside and people prefer to wait a while to have a look at it. Easy accessibility, affordable accommodations are the main assets of this place.

## **II. Discussion:**

As tourist showed preference for Alibaug, villagers from nearby villages identified the potential in tourism. Women looked at it as the golden opportunity and thought of offering homely food at reasonable cost. This came out to be the turning point and visitors with vegetarian / nonvegetarian likings selected these places for short one day or weekend picnics. More and more women spotted the probable scope for entrepreneurship and modified their typical village houses into holiday resorts and eateries. Surprisingly reasonable in cost still amazingly delicious food, though not lavish yet affordable and clean accommodation, easy commuting by own or public transport are the assets of these places. The village woman offered vegetarian and non-vegetarian breakfast and meals at surprisingly low cost. Vegetables cultivated in the backyard, freshly netted fish, locally grown poultry birds made all these preparations hygienic. The most affectionate gesture is women and her family doing all the jobs- right from cooking till serving and cleaning. More and more tourist from the nearby cities started visiting these coastal villages. Fairer gender decided to exploit this situation and microfinance came to be boon for them. They could seek quick and easy finance options from local credit societies, self help groups (locally known as Bheesi) and some times Gramin Banks.

**In bheesi** (Self help group) there are small groups of women who contribute a particular amount per month. Lots are drawn every month and the winner gets entire amount collected. This system can be made need based in which if a women required finance, she can avail the entire amount (twelve times the amount contributed by every women). For these women this is the best possible way of receiving finance for their home business.

**Credit societies** introduced by local people offer fast and easy loans. They offer low interest rates not on loans and lucrative interests on savings like Fixed or Recurring deposits. These women can draw loans for preparing kitchen products such as, pickles, papads, coconut delicacies, and many other edible goods for selling. The income generated through this selling by these women can help them not only for repayment of loan but also for investment.

**Gramin Banks** are organizations of larger magnitude offering higher amounts in comparison to the above agencies as loans. They are established to financially support underprivileged people in setting businesses or agriculture. Making poor or needy groups financially independent is the purpose of these banks. For confirmed repayment of loans drawn by villagers, they are offered facilities like weekly repayment, longer repayment terms, group lending, etc. Women from these villages certainly benefitted from such organisations and developed Annapurna scheme and Mahila Manch.

They got into making other products typical of Konkan on a large scale and offering them at enticing prices. Papads made of rice flakes, potato, spinach, black pepper, garlic, coriander leaves etc, kokum preparations like squash, antacid lozenges and extract, pickles of lemon, raw mango, home-made spices, chikkis, tender coconuts, white skinned onions, tamarind in various forms, salted and sweet jackfruit wafers, dried jackfruit pulp and many more are made available for the tourists. All these products are displayed in an attractive manner so as to invite more and more buyers. Fishes, fish products are also sold and this is one of the main attractions because here fish is fresh and comparatively cheaper. These women have considerably succeeded in making these products as one of the irresistible temptations for tourists. Their houses have been converted into typical guest houses. Village look of the house is retained and yet an attempt has been made to provide most possible modern amenities.

Urban women have an entirely different take on this. They need most of these home-made products but have no time to make them at home due to their busy schedules. They find it quite worthwhile to visit these

village industries and buy many of these products. This way, they can have their kitchen requirements satisfied and the women entrepreneurs generate their income.

### **III. Conclusion:**

The give and take relationship of urban and rural women has not only raised the financial levels of village women but is also responsible for supporting economy of the villages in a broader perspective.

The villages once inhabited by middle class or poor villagers are now becoming places of tourist attraction. The homemaker woman has become an entrepreneur. In some of these villages almost every house has become either a tourist home or an eatery serving vegetarian and non-vegetarian delicacies. That typical orthodox konkan look is getting replaced by established cottage industrial locality.

The rise in income has opened up many avenues for the younger generation of the villages; a surge to educate and empower them is a noted trend amongst the women entrepreneurs here. The education received and the conducive environment has given rise to various entrepreneurial set ups like apiculture, pisci-culture, crab culture, mushroom cultivation and prawn culture which are also publicized as informative tourist spots.

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